

SENTENCE:
A JOURNAL OF
PROSE POETICS

No. 2



Sentence: a Journal of Prose Poetics, No. 2

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Editorial Notes

In my review of David Lehman’s *Great American Prose Poems: From Poe to the Present*, I incorrectly identified the nationality of Linh Dinh, who is an American citizen. It is inexcusable not to check facts more diligently, and I apologize to Linh Dinh and to *Sentence* readers. I am delighted to have his work in this issue.

On the general topic of American-ness, David Lehman says “With regard to *Best American Poetry* as well as *Great American Prose Poems*, we long ago adopted a policy of broad construction of the “American” in the title. I’ve discussed this in the foreword of several editions in the *Best American*

Poetry series. Our sense of American, tantamount to North American, embraces Canadian poets... and, of course, Americans living abroad are eligible.”

§

We are pleased to announce that *Sentence* 3 will include a special feature on “The Prose Poem in Great Britain,” edited by Nikki Santilli, author of *Such Rare Citings: The Prose Poem in English Literature*.

We are pleased to announce also that Peter Johnson will guest edit *Sentence* 4.

Foreword

In April 2003, before our first issue appeared, we were accosted at the *Sentence* table by a book fair attendee who insisted that we change the subtitle of this journal. It seems she was perturbed by the fact that poetics from the beginning (Aristotle) has referred to more than poetry and that, therefore, “prose poetics” is both redundant and misleading (an unsuspecting passerby might interpret the subtitle to point to an interest in the poetics of fiction, for example).

I share some of her misgivings about the subtitle. When we started *Sentence* we decided to add a subtitle that would identify both our interest in prose poems and in the poetics of the prose poem. At the risk of incurring the wrath of such sticklers as mentioned above and fearful of no one having any idea what we were talking about, we decided to coin a phrase and hoped that it would gain currency. Our solution, we recognized, wasn't perfect, but it was shorter than “A Journal of the Prose Poem, the Poetics of the Prose Poem, ‘Poet’s Prose,’ and Other Work that Isn’t Exactly Prose Poetry.”

Well, it turns out we didn't coin the phrase. About the time we were laying the foundation for *Sentence*, *TriQuarterly* published a special section edited by Campbell McGrath entitled, simply, “Prose Poetics.” The section contained a wide variety of prose poems and work that borders the prose poem. So, we discovered, someone out there was on our wavelength.

But there are more. Here, for your perusal, are a variety of uses of the phrase. Some uses clearly refer to the prose poem and the poetics of the prose poem. Other instances clearly refer to the poetics of prose fiction. And some use the term as an inexact index to work of indistinct genre. We offer these in

the spirit of ongoing dialogue and hope that some of our readers might have comments more thoughtful than a demand to rename.

- In 2001, *Nineteenth Century French Studies* published an article by Anne Jamison entitled “Anywhere Out of this Verse: Baudelaire’s Prose Poetics and the Aesthetics of Transgression.”
- A review in the online magazine *Blastitude* in November 2000 noted “one long typed stream of small-print run-on prose poetics (stream of consciousness sentence fragments rammed up against each other so hard that the punctuation just disappears).”
- From the University of Chicago course catalogue: 40500. The Subaltern Sublime: Robert Walser’s Prose Poetics. This seminar will focus on the work of one of the most distinctive literary voices in German literature of the twentieth century, Robert Walser. Walser’s prose writings elaborate a poetics of exuberant impotence, transforming subjective destitution into a unique position of literary enunciation.
- Elizabeth Tsukahara, at <http://beta.indeterminancy.com/lists>, lists prose poetics as a “special interest area” in her studies.
- A blurb for the online magazine *Digital Fiction* invites us to “Follow the journey into the dark side of urban life and human psyche. A blend of text and moving image, a slant on the prose poetics of life, the twisted dialogue of suburbia.”
- Marketing copy for *Procession. The Lovely Tale of Photography, Works of Péter Nádas* claims that “novelties in film semiotics influenced the Hungarian prose poetics of the 50–60’s.”

- An Amazon user identified as Bewildered_by_words says of a book purported to be a mixture of poetry, philosophy, and fiction written by an author living with schizophrenia “This gets weird. Very weird. ...no real plot or story or characters to speak of. An exploration into prose poetics....”
- Marketing copy for Mary Ellen Bellan’s *Gerard Manley Hopkins’s Journal and the Poetics of Natural History* says “Hopkins’s prose poetics pushes verbal representation to its limits as he reconstitutes visual experience in text and pursues his own version of the naming and knowing projects of nineteenth-century natural history.”
- Darren Matthies is working on his MA in English at the University of Calgary; he is writing a creative thesis that explores genre theory and the practice of prose poetics.
- Recently, James Grinwis used the phrase in an article on prose poetry in *In Posse Review* (see the Bibliography in this issue): “Later, in the 1400s, in Japan and throughout Asia, the prose poetics of Zen parables became quite popular.”

We invite commentary on the use of this phrase, and we also invite responses to any of the essays and reviews in this issue.